It Happened to Hedderley

BY HARRISON CLARK.

The sound of many feet hurrying through cabins and across decks came with ponderous dizziness to Mr. Jiggs Hedderley as he lay in his berth and groaned, and thought of home, and begged forgiveness for ever going to sea, and wished for death.

Hedderley was seasick. Some twenty hours before the steamship Isinglass, bound from Galveston to New York, had run plumb into a West Indies hurricane, had tossed about like a crazy thing until she had lost several of her vitals, and had then taken to tumbling and wallowing about sportively with the busy waves—one result among many being that Hedderley had been reduced to this.

"I wish the fool tub would sink!" he declared fervently.

And just then there came a terrific pounding at his door.

"Get out in a hurry," an excited voice shouted. "The ship is on fire!"

"That's just as good," whimpered Hedderley, "if it wasn't so slow!"

"Hurry—hurry!" cried the voice; and the racket at the door grew quite furious.

"Get away from that door!" shouted Hedderley.

"For the last time——" pleaded the voice at the door.

"For the last time, get away from that door and let me die in peace," Hedderley shouted weakly.

"You go to——."

"If I do," interrupted Hedderley, "I'll go by land!"

Hedderley gave little heed to the man's retreating footsteps. What did it matter?—what did anything matter?—so long as his entire interior works were determined to get away from him? He was not even appalled by the silence that came as the tramping ceased and the shouts died away and the rattle of oarlocks dimmed into nothingness. There wasn't anything this side of the peace of eternity that he cared for. There was something, too. He recalled that it was something which he had thought of considerably, and had been greatly interested in. But—now—he couldn't just think——Oh, what was the difference! It would all be over in a little while.

And just as he reached this decision his stateroom stood on its side and he scraped knuckles and shins trying to catch hold of something.

"For the love of mercy," he pleaded, with tears coming into his eyes, "sink if you want to, blow up, or burn up, or just vanish; but don't—Oh, please don't—do any more tumbling!"

"Boom!" came a thunderous report, and the vessel shook and leaped slightly and then took her nose out of the air with an impetuosity that recalled to him all his troubles.

"Was I born for this?" he groaned. He sat up suddenly. "Why don't you sink!" he shouted viciously. "How many convulsions are you going to have, you—you—— Oh, I wish you were a horse so I would know how to cuss you!" And weeping and whimpering in his weakness and misery, he dropped back, turned his face to the wall and went to sleep.

When Hedderley awoke he did not know whether it was the next day or the next week or the same afternoon. He was certain only that his head ached as if a thousand devils were using it as a community anvil, and that his room was stuffy and hot. He staggered to the door and threw it open and went groping into the cabin. Presently he became conscious that the air had a tang to it that was—— What was it? Ah! he remembered—charred wood! . . . Of course, he had been warned. The vessel was on fire! . . . He felt very weak, and stretched out his hand toward a pillar. But he straightened himself and laughed. For there had to be smoke if there was a fire, and there wasn't any smoke! So the fire must be out. And the Isinglass was still afloat and he was safe!

Safe? Awhile ago he had no reason for wanting to be safe—except one; and he couldn't think what that was. But . . . It makes a lot of difference the way one's stomach is behaving. The ship was floating quietly; she had altogether quit her crazy acrobatics, and he was glad of it. He liked quiet. . . . Quiet? . . . Why, there wasn't anything but quiet! There wasn't a sound to be heard—not even the tramp of a sailor's feet on the deck above his head! . . . Slowly the realization grew: He was a single soul on a disabled ship!

He felt very lonesome. The silence awed him; it made him hear strange things, and he found himself starting and shrinking at—what must have been nothing, though it was actual enough for the instant of its seeming reality. After awhile inaction became unbearable; so with a feeling that he was invading a tomb which was soon to be also his own, he went forth.

It was all as he had expected—nobody except himself, no land in sight, no friendly smoke on the horizon—no hope! So far as he could discover, the Isinglass was entirely seaworthy. She certainly did not appear to be sinking; for at bow and stern she floated high. There was no fire, though there had been a disastrous one. The rear half of the deck had been burned—the planks gone from an interior that yawned black, the wheel a charred heap of useless spokes and wire, the compass a melted mass, and all about a forest of masts, spars, funnels and a lot of other things which Hedderley knew nothing of, rearing stark naked black lengths against the air.

The passenger cabins had not been damaged. They were much as Hedderley remembered them before—well, before the storm! The buffet seemed to be intact; and as Hedderley found the bourbon bottle and separated four fingers for immediate use, he gave his first sigh of relief and whispered:

"Starvation, drowning—death in many forms—may threaten me; but from the looks of things I shan't die of thirst."

The clamorings of a sorely tried and thoroughly emptied stomach drove him to a search for the "kitchen." He hadn't the least idea where he might find it. His impression was that it was in the neighborhood of what somebody had called the poop deck, but where in blazes was the poop deck? He resolved that there must be a path to it from the dining saloon, and he knew where that was. So from the dining saloon he began his search. It led him along a labyrinthian course through pantries and passageways, and brought him to a huge room of blackened woodwork and broken glass and pots, pans and kettles, but no food.

However, there was bound to be food somewhere. And he made a desperate dash for a big charred door at the further end.

"Saved!" he cried. For before him and to each side of him, in boxes and crates and buckets and cans, was food! And not a thing was damaged!

He ripped open a tin of cardines and, standing, ate ravenously. A second tin—and he decided to sit down. There was no place to sit except on the floor, so he sat there; and, with fresh cans and cartons of crackers at his hand, and in a solemn silence, broken only by the mild rasp of the sardine box against the floor and the crisp munching of crackers, feasted.

Suddenly his jaws ceased to work, and the sardine box became still, while his overstrained heart thumped desperately. A strange noise had entered—footfalls, muffled, but with a slight scratchiness——

Hedderley turned sharply . . . And a bull terrier, with a great black spot encircling his right eye, stopped short in the floor a dozen feet away, wagged his stub of a tail, and whined beggingly.

"You bet your life you may!" laughed Hedderley. And a moment later the dog, in his arms, was licking his face while being frantically squeezed and patted.

"Gee, it is good to meet somebody!" fervently declared Hedderley, holding the dog off for a good look.

He divided with his guest, and the interrupted feast was resumed. The pile of emptied tins grew and grew. The dog, eventually, was satisfied, but Hedderley didn't know that he ever would quit eating—— Until a rumble of thunder brought him to a stand. He looked at the dog. The dog looked at him.

"What are we going to do about it, Bo?" he asked, weakly.

The dog growled as a second rumble sounded, and the vessel began to roll.

Hedderley sighed, and his complexion became a pale green.

"Now, I guess this fool wreck will go tumbling and jumping all over creation again," he said. "And what will all this stuff do to me? Bo, what is your recipt against seasickness?"

A terrific crash sent the dog, bristling and growling angrily, to a defiant position at the man's side; and it made the man tremble.

The vessel pitched recklessly, and Hedderley and the dog began to skate and tumble from side to side and end to end of the storeroom.

"Let's try to get somewhere that will stay still," advised Hedderley; and as he started a laborious retracing of the course to the salon the dog followed—though how he managed it was a puzzle to Hedderley. His claws scraped unholding over the floors, and his round body, once he was off his feet, rolled cylinder-like across whatever space lay before it. It seemed a very long while before they reached the salon.

"But it is worth the trouble!" muttered Hedderley thankfully as he followed the dog's example and sprawled on the thick carpet.

The darkness was complete. Not even a flash of lightning reached in now and then to pierce it. Dog and man lay close to each other; and at intervals the dog's tongue touched the man's outstretched hand with a caress that seemed to promise all possible protection.

Hedderley had no means of estimating how many hours he and the dog clung to the carpet. To his wearied mind it seemed at least a full night, and he strained his eyes for a sign that the dawn had come. The thunder ceased, and it did not seem that the wind was so high; but the waves continued to drive the Isinglass in her game of leapfrog with the sea—and the man and the dog dared not rise.

Upward and forward shot the ship—hurled by a power that might have torn a mountain from its base—moving evenly as an arrow and with more than an arrow's speed—— And then, with force spent, the huge missile was pulled down by its ponderous weight—to crash thunderously, and tremble in every plate and timber—and then to lie still in a sudden quiet that was stupendous!

"Under the waves dwells silence," Hedderley murmured. For he had no manner of doubt that the harried derelict was dropping to a wreck's bed amid coral reefs. "Are you ready, Bo?"

The dog sprang up and began to sniff about.

"Needn't go to meet trouble," advised the man. "It's hot-footing for us—you can bet on that!"

An excited whine from the dog caused the man to sit up and listen. There certainly was no sound of water rushing in.

"I wonder if I'm fooled again on this sinking proposition?" he asked. And he arose and started forward. The dog led the way to the upper deck.

The air that met them was sweet and soft; and all that broke the stillness was the laughing gurgle of water lapping the sides of the unmoving ship, and, further away, the solemn boom of beating waves!

When daylight came it revealed the accomplishment of the impossible. Hedderley looked—and turned to hide a blush at the thought that he was in any way party to such a stupendous fake. To expect it to be true that an ocean liner had been bodily lifted and thrown over a reef through a 100-foot passage between cliffs and to a bed upon the soft sand of a safely harbored beach——

"Oh, what a dream sardines can produce!" he murmured.

But it was hard to get away from appearances. There were the ship and the beach and the bay, and outside was the ocean, and he could not lose the recollection that a few hours before the ship had been out there on the ocean. Now—there wasn't any question of it—she was in the harbor, and the only way she could have got there was to jump or be thrown through that narrow cliff-guarded passage.

Hedderley's bay was a small, horseshoe shaped affair—plenty of smooth water for a ship that was just resting, ample expanses of white beach, and as a background frowning cliffs that loomed ugly in the early morning light. Between the heels of the horseshoe was a noisy neck of water that made a great to-do about running to and from the sea over a reef of larger rocks, set thirty to forty feet apart and showing sharp edges under the white surf. The ship was surrounded by water to a depth of ten or fifteen feet, and was firmly held—listing a little to starboard and down a little by the stern, but altogether on a fairly even keel.

The scene was not cheerful. There was no evidence that any one lived in the neighborhood or that any one ever had lived there, or that any one could live there. It was reasonable to suspect the place of being an island, but Hedderley could not determine this point, there being no small boats, and the water being too deep for wading, and Hedderley being unable to swim. And what was back of or close by the island was another secret, contemplation of which led Hedderley to cry out:

"Oh, why did I leave home!"

As answer there came to him again that mysterious recollection of something forgotten—something that he once thought of a lot. But he couldn't grasp it; the answer stood at the threshold of his mind, but would not enter.

"Ain't it the limit—" he began, and left it at that, as, calling the dog, he went below for breakfast.

And while he ate it occurred to him that he was quite safe from every danger save ennui. He had a safe house, and food and water and liquors and wines that would last 500 people twenty days, and which, therefore, should last him and Bo something like fifteen years. There was an immense supply of ice, and in the hold was so much coal that the thought of carrying it up produced a feeling akin to nervous prostration. The sleeping arrangements were all that could be desired. There were 100 state rooms, in most of which the beds were made up; hence Hedderley, by merely changing his room every night, could avoid the task of bedmaking. And in the buffet—in addition to the liquors—were boxes upon boxes of cigars and cigarettes. And there was a piano and music, and books of all titles and subjects.

It wasn't so bad to be marooned!

Hedderley was busy enough the first day finding and classifying things; the second day also he had enough to do. But the third day began to be monotonous. There was a ghostliness about the silence of the ship, and the silence of the day, and the silence of the night. It got on his nerves, and took his mind from his book, and forced him to walk—on the deck, where he could kick up something of a racket; and then in the saloon, where he couldn't kick up a racket because of the carpet, and where in desperation he sat down at the piano and played rag-time, with much attention to the loud pedal and the bass keys.

Then he sat, with fingers clasped, on the piano stool, and was sympathizing with himself as thoroughly as if he were a widow, when a gentle ticking noise caught his ear. Queer tricks this silence played! For the ticking brought to him, strangely enough, that period before he went in for cattle on a large scale, when he was a T. & O. operator up in the Panhandle—reporting one train and the weather morning and night by way of earning his salary, and by way of enjoying life flirting brazenly over the idle wire with a red-headed girl down the road! "I-g" used to be his call—and absently he drummed the two dots, two dashes and a dot on the edge of the piano. And the girl's station was "s-t"—and she always insisted that he made "b" of it when he got in a hurry. He drummed away, the long-unused muscles seeming to laugh as they loosened themselves to the task, and a reminiscent smile spreading over his face.

What— His fingers stopped, stiff and still; and his eyes grew wide; and he grasped the edge of the piano stool and lifted himself; and his lower jaw dropped—and he stood staring toward the end of the saloon, speechless, with dry mouth and aching throat and burning eyes. For as certain as he had hearing, there was the old call echoing through the ship!

He staggered, and passed a hand across his eyes, and laughed.

"Nothing to it, Bo," he said weakly. "I'm crazy. I'm hearing funny noises. First thing you know I'll be busy tying knots in the tails of pink kangaroos! I'm—I'm batty!"

He laughed again, and started across the saloon toward a large easy chair. But he stopped half way; for the "call" had been answered and two people were "talking."

His head swam, and he reeled to the chair and dropped, gasping, into it. And then, as if he had been shot out of a strong spring, he leaped up, laughing hysterically and thrusting his shaking hands before him gropingly.

"Come on, Bo!" he cried. "Come on! It's all right. We're saved. It's the wireless!"

He plunged into the little room where the receiving instrument was. His shaking fingers touched the rubber knob, and desperately he began to "call."

"Who's the goat?" asked one of the "talkers" presently; and Hedderley laughed with all his voice, and straightened out in his chair; and felt strong—and rattled away crazily at the key.

"I'm Hedderley," he wrote.

"But you sound so much like a fake!" broke in "S-t."

"I'm not a fake! Here, you folks—whoever you are and wha ever kind of liquid circulates through you! Wire to the cattle firm of Hedderley, Hedderley & Hedderley at Amarillo, and ask if they don't know Hedderley! And if he's all right!"

"Of course! But—isn't there some one else?"

"Scores! Whom do you want? Society? Wire Miss Amelia Grinley of Albany, N. Y., and ask her—— Say!" his key fairly shouted. "Say, you—both of you! That's it! That's what I've been trying to remember! That's why I left home! Say! Please—— Why, I'm to marry that girl on the 27th!"

"Br-r-r-r-r!" sputtered Jimmy; but "S-t" interrupted reprovingly.

"And you had forgotten . . . that?"

"No," said Hedderley. "I hadn't forgotten it. I remembered it all the time—don't you know? But, confound it, I couldn't think what it was I was remembering! I was on my way to the wed—— Oh, please help me out of this scrape!"

"S-t" drummed thoughtfully.

"Do you think she would have him now?" she wrote.

"She certainly ought not to——" replied Jimmy before Hedderley broke in with:

"You leave that to the girl! And if you can't or won't get me out of this fix, please let the girl know about it!"

"That's fair enough," said "S-t," after a silence. "Jimmy, you sail in and wire that young woman. And meantime——" Her key drummed meaninglessly until the sound became tiresome.

"Meantime, what?" demanded Jimmy.

"Meantime," she continued, "I'll see

Continued on Page 12.

"Why—why—why—it's Amelia," he roared.